

## **Teaching at OLLI: Prep 101**

### **by Jim Lenburg**

I've learned I have to be careful what I say today, because I might find myself eating those words later! When I retired from a 33-year career teaching history at Mars Hill University, I swore I'd never teach again. It wasn't long until I ate those words, and I now find that putting together a new course for OLLI's College for Seniors is one of my great pleasures.

One advantage I enjoy is that some of the material I teach today is material I taught to undergraduates in my previous life. OLLI participants, however, present very different challenges – and joys. They are well educated, they are well read, and they have extensive real life and travel experiences. Many may know the material as well or even better than I do. They demand – rightly so – that their instructors have both an extensive knowledge of the material they present as well as passion in presenting it.

Here's what preparation for a new course looks like to me: Two terms before the term starts when I will teach a new class, I review the material I might have previously taught. I put together a reading list of recent articles and books about the material. That involves a month or two of extensive reading. After taking notes on the reading and gaining new insights, I integrate the new material into whatever existing material I want to include. After sketching what might be covered in each class, I begin writing lectures. It usually takes me a week to write one lecture.

My next step is to develop a PowerPoint for each of the class sessions. I try to integrate maps, pictures, music and sometimes YouTube videos to supplement the lectures. Again I spend about a week to put together each PowerPoint.

The weekend before the class begins I review the lecture and PowerPoint for that week to refresh my memory. I do the same thing the day before the presentation. The

extensive time I put into preparation, often more than 100 hours, has two important consequences: 1) it helps me gain a deeper understanding of the material I am about to present and 2) it encourages me to be passionate about presenting it.

Good preparation and passion are for me the keys to whatever success I have had teaching in the College for Seniors. I get such joy and fulfillment from my interactions with participants that I expect to teach again and again.